



2023 Annual Report



Introduction

The primary responsibility of the Lee County Coroner's Office is to investigate and certify the cause and manner of death of individuals who have died in Lee County, or in instances in which the events leading to a person's death originated in Lee County.

The Coroner and all appointed staff have responsibility and authority granted by Code of Alabama, 1975, including § 11-5-1 and § 45-41-6, et al.

Deaths investigated by the Coroner's Office include, but are not limited to the following criteria:

- Sudden, unexpected, or unexplained deaths.
- Deaths that occur under violent or suspicious circumstances.
- Deaths suspected to have resulted from disease, contagion, or pathogen which may be hazardous, or which may constitute a threat to the health of the general public.
- Deaths where no physician is in attendance, or where, though in attendance, the physician is unable/unwilling to certify the cause of death.
- Deaths from thermal, chemical, or radiation injury.
- Deaths from an industrial accident or deaths suspected to be involved with or related to the decedent's occupation.
- Deaths that occur in a hospital less than 24 hours after admission or after any invasive procedure.
- Death suspected to be related to drug and/or alcohol intoxication or the result of exposure to drugs or toxic agents.
- Deaths due to abuse/neglect or suspected abuse/neglect.
- Death of a fetus of 20 or more weeks gestational age that is unattended by a physician.
- Maternal death up to 1 year post delivery.
- Death of a pregnant woman irrespective of length (term) of pregnancy.
- Any death of an infant or child where the medical history has not established a significant pre-existing condition.
- Deaths occurring while in the custody of law enforcement officials or while incarcerated in a public institution (Federal, State, City or County inmates located in Lee County).

Coroner Daniel Sexton

Daniel Sexton was appointed Special Coroner in early July 2022 following the unexpected death of long time Lee County Coroner Mr. William "Bill" Harris. Upon being appointed, Special Coroner Daniel Sexton assessed the office, and deemed that in order to increase the efficiency and citizen service, modernization of the Coroner's Office Operations was essential.

Initial steps included the immediate introduction of software to collect information about each death investigated, thus providing much-needed accurate collection and recording of decedent data as prior to August 2022 the LCCO had utilized an antiquated pen and paper system.

Special Coroner Sexton also introduced written Standard Operating Policies and Procedures. These SOPs included the creation of standardized forms and processes, introduction of uniforms and ID cards, education standards that exceed the state mandated minimums, and more.

On Tuesday, November 8, 2022, Special Coroner Sexton was elected Coroner, and was sworn in to his first 4-year term on January 16, 2023.

2023 was Coroner Sexton's first full year serving as Coroner and was another year of positive accomplishments, which are outlined broadly in this report. In addition, this report also outlines the goals that we've set for this Office going forward.

We are proud of this office and its accomplishments, and it is important to note that none of this would be possible without the partnership and financial support of the Lee County Commission, who deserve to be recognized for their part in making this office better for the Citizens of Lee County.

Coroner's Office Personnel
(as of December 31, 2023)

Daniel Sexton	Coroner
Bill Dye	Deputy Coroner
Brad Whetstone	Deputy Coroner
Zack Harrelson	Deputy Coroner

The Coroner and/or a Deputy Coroner are on duty 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The Coroner and each Deputy Coroner are on-duty as "first call" for approximately 168 hours each month.

Additionally, each Deputy Coroner spends approximately 40 hours per month on required administrative tasks related to the death investigation calls they are assigned.

Coroner Sexton, spends an additional 160+ hours per month on legally required administrative tasks such as certifying/signing death certificates in both Alabama & Georgia, filing reports with ADFS and ADPH, attending autopsies, meeting with or talking to Family Members, Hospitals, Funeral Homes, Hospice providers, and various other departments and officials, responding with Deputy Coroners as "backup" as well as keeping the Coroner's Office running day-to-day.

Accomplishments of the Coroner's Office in 2023

Case management Software:

The FY2024 budget that started on October 1, 2023, provided the Coroner's Office with the necessary funding to implement Vertiq Case Management Software. We started the implementation process in November 2023 and went live January 1, 2024.

Transportation of Decedents:

The Lee County Coroner's Office officially started transporting decedents in June 2023 after the County Commission made a special allocation of funds for the Coroner's Office to purchase a van along with all the necessary equipment needed to transport decedents.

County Morgue:

After many discussions and meetings in 2023, the first installment of funds for the construction of a Morgue Facility were in the FY2024 budget. We anticipate being able to start construction of the Morgue facility in late 2024 so that construction will coincide with the FY2025 budget.

Transportation:

Prior to December 2023, the Coroner and all Deputy Coroner's were using their personal vehicles to conduct official business. In December 2023, we were able to purchase 2 – 2023 Ford Bronco Sport's from the state bid list. This is yet another monumental step forward, allowing us to keep the necessary equipment in our county owned vehicles and respond directly to calls while relieving department personnel and the county from a legal mine field resulting for using personal vehicles for county business.

Information Technology:

We were able to purchase laptops and cell phones for each employee of the Coroner's Office so that they no longer have to use their personal computers and phones to conduct official business. This use of personal devices for official business represented a legal, evidentiary, and security risk for both the Coroner's Office and the County. Further, we were able to install data devices in both Bronco's allowing us to use our laptops to complete reports or lookup records right on scene.

Citizen Communications:

A redesigned website was launched with a more modern look and feel to make it easier for the Coroner's Office to effectively communicate with citizens as well as make it easier for citizens to find the information they need.

2024 Goals of the Coroner's Office

The following are goals that the Coroner's Office is working on for 2024 and beyond. (In no specific Order)

- Continue to provide respectful, dignified care, and transfer of all decedents.
 - Including caring, compassionate, and family centered services to the citizens of Lee County who have lost a loved one.
- Become the 3rd Coroner's Office in Alabama to be accredited by the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME).
 - Accreditation ensures that nationally set standards of Death Investigation are followed and operations of the office meet all criteria put forth by our national organizations.
 - **2023 Update:** This is a long and arduous process, but we continue to work diligently make progress and towards this goal.
- Continue education of all staff and maintain education levels above the state mandated minimums.
 - Currently state law only requires 12 hours of training annually.
 - The Coroner's Office needs specific training/continuing education in the following: general death investigation, infant/child deaths, identification of elder abuse/neglect, death investigation report writing, cause of death determination, homicide investigation, MVC investigations, workplace/industrial accidents, training on determination of decomposition time frames.
- Actively Participate in and advocate for the Alabama State Coroners Association.
- Maintain and continue growing our relationship with local and state governmental entities such Lee County Commission, Law Enforcement, EMA, EMS, Fire, District Attorney, ADPH, ADFS, and others.
- Continue to leverage technology to increase efficiency and service.
- Provide timely and accurate statistical data to the County Commission for use in funding requests and decision making processes.

- Maintain and grow our relationship with Local Funeral Homes, Hospitals, Hospices, and other facilities.
- Continue to improve the professional image of this Office in the Community.

Total Deaths by Manner

State law recognizes 5 different manners of death. Every death must be categorized into one of these 5 manners of death.

Manner of Death				
	2022		2023	
Natural	140	73%	324	76%
Homicide	8	4%	12	3%
Accident	21	11%	68	16%
Suicide	15	8%	18	4%
Undetermined	7	4%	5	1%
	191		427	

Total Deaths by Cause

While State Law only recognizes 5 Manners of Death, there is a virtually unlimited number of Causes of Death. We have organized the 427 cases we investigated into 22 broad & general categories.

Cause of Death		
Cancer	34	8.0%
Cardiovascular Disease	173	40.5%
Cerebrovascular Disease	20	4.7%
Diabetes Mellitus	8	1.9%
Drowning	1	0.2%
Failure to Thrive	10	2.3%
Fall	5	1.2%
Fetal Demise	9	2.1%
Gastrointestinal Disease	5	1.2%
Gunshot Wound	19	4.4%
Hanging / Asphyxiation	5	1.2%
Hepatic Disease	4	0.9%
Human Immunodeficiency Virus	2	0.5%
Motor Vehicle Accident	39	9.1%
Overdose	33	7.7%
Peptic Disease	1	0.2%
Post Operative Complications	1	0.2%
Pulmonary Disease	35	8.2%
Renal Disease	7	1.6%
Sepsis	10	2.3%
Sickle Cell	1	0.2%
Undetermined	5	1.2%
	427	

Unnatural Deaths:

	GSW	Hanging	MVA	Drowning	Fall	Overdose	Other	Total
Homicide	6	0	2	1	0	0	3	12
Suicide	13	2	0	0	0	0	3	18
Accident	0	0	27	0	5	33	3	68
	19	2	29	1	5	33	9	98

Cause of Death - Homicide		
Gunshot	6	50%
MVC	2	17%
Drowning	1	8%
Sharp and/or Blunt Force Trauma	2	17%
Undetermined	1	8%
	12	

Cause of Death - Suicide		
Gunshot	13	72%
Hanging	2	11%
Asphyxiation	3	17%
	18	

Cause of Death - Accident		
Overdose	33	49%
Motor Vehicle Accident	27	40%
Fall	5	7%
Asphyxiation	3	4%
	68	

Accidental Overdoes:

Accidental Overdose		
Ethanol	2	6%
Fentanyl Present	18	55%
No Fentanyl Present	13	39%
	33	

Fentanyl Overdose Statistics					
Sex			Age		
Male	12	67%	20-29	8	44%
Female	6	33%	30-39	5	28%
	18		40-49	5	28%
				18	

Race		
Black	3	17%
White	15	83%
	18	

MVA Deaths:

Age Group		
0-19	3	11%
20-39	11	41%
40-59	9	33%
50-79	4	15%
80+	0	0%
	27	

Sex		
Female	8	30%
Male	19	70%
	27	

Race		
Asian	1	4%
Black	9	33%
Hispanic	4	15%
White	13	48%
	27	

Drugs/Alcohol Involved		
Yes	14	52%
No	13	48%
	27	

Autopsy:

	Total Cases	Autopsy	% of Total Cases	% of Autopsies
Homicide	12	12	100%	10%
Suicide	18	17	94%	14%
Accident	68	50	74%	42%
Natural	324	35	11%	29%
Undetermined	5	5	100%	4%
	427	119	28%	

	Autopsy	Coroner Attended	% Attended
Homicide	12	5	42%
Suicide	17	2	12%
Accident	50	5	10%
Natural	35	4	11%
Undetermined	5	3	60%
	119	19	16%

Child Deaths:

	Homicide	Suicide	Natural	Accident	Undetermined	Total
≤17 y/o	1	1	13	2	5	22
	5%	5%	59%	9%	23%	

Child Death Autopsies:

	Homicide	Suicide	Natural	Accident	Undetermined	Total
≤17 y/o	1	1	4	2	5	13
	100%	100%	31%	100%	100%	

Scene Response by Lee County Coroner's Office:

	Total Cases	Sexton	Harrelson	Whetstone	Dye	Total Responses	% Responded to
Homicide	12	4	2	5	1	12	100%
Suicide	18	5	3	5	4	17	94%
Accident	68	14	15	23	10	62	91%
Natural	324	50	42	81	60	233	72%
Undetermined	5	2	1	1	1	5	100%
	427	75	63	115	76	329	77%

Demographics:**Sex of Decedent:**

	Total Cases	Male	Female
Homicide	12	9	3
Suicide	18	14	4
Accident	68	50	18
Natural	324	197	127
Undetermined	5	4	1
	427	274	153

Race of Decedent:

	Total Cases	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Homicide	12	3	8	1	0	0
Suicide	18	15	2	1	0	0
Accident	68	49	13	5	1	0
Natural	324	197	119	4	3	1
Undetermined	5	3	2	0	0	0
	427	267	144	11	4	1

Age of Decedent:

	Total Cases	0-19	20-39	40-59	60-79	80+
Homicide	12	2	6	2	1	1
Suicide	18	2	3	5	7	1
Accident	68	4	31	19	11	3
Natural	324	14	15	60	159	76
Undetermined	5	4	0	0	1	0
	427	26	55	86	179	81

Transportation of Decedents:

As noted above we started transporting decedents in June 2023

	APD	LCSO	APD	PCPD	ALEA	Other	Total
Transports	14	28	15	5	6	3	71

Transportation Financials:

	Billed	Capital Purchase	Expenses
June - Dec 2023	\$32,750.00	\$56,666.43	\$1,207.93

Unclaimed/Unidentified Decedents:

As of December 31, 2023 the Lee County Coroner's Office did not have any unclaimed or unidentified decedents.

Cremation Permits:

Code of Alabama 22-9A-16(a) requires the County Coroner to sign cremation permits for all deaths that occurred in the county or were investigated by the Coroner. This includes hospice deaths, inpatient deaths, and deaths where a physician has signed the death certificate (non-coroner cases).

Cremation Permits Signed: 571